



CLEAN WATER ACTION

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Written Testimony of Roger Smith, Campaign Director for Clean Water Action
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Energy and Technology Committee
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Testimony in Support of HOUSE BILL 5597 "AN ACT CONCERNING BIOMASS"

Clean Water Action has been a leader in the fight to clean up Connecticut's Sooty Six power plants and to support clean renewable energy through our 20% by 2010 municipal clean energy campaign. We are very concerned about the ongoing weakening of the definition of Class I renewable energy to include construction and demolition wood. It dilutes the market for Class I renewable energy credits (RECs), damages the public perception of biomass as clean, and poses an unacceptable environmental and public health risk. For these reasons we support the attempt in HB 5597 to limit the size of this problem.

Unclean in any quantity

Construction and demolition (C&D) waste is not a sustainable clean energy feedstock. Over the past year we have been working on the waste permitting process for the Plainfield Renewable Energy C&D biomass plant and have come to the conclusion that there are major inherent problems with that proposed plant, and any plant like it. While on paper, Connecticut law can mandate that C&D wood be sorted to exclude heavy metals, chemically treated wood, lead paint, etc, there are no sorting and enforcement mechanisms today that can reliably exclude such contaminants. As matter cannot be destroyed, and no pollution control is 100% effective, heavy metals entering the plant will exit the plant as either captured ash and need to be landfilled as hazardous waste, or escape as uncaptured ash.

HB 5597- a limited fix

This bill appears to reduce the number of C&D biomass plants eligible for the CT RPS which will somewhat mitigate the dilution of REC prices. This is important as high REC prices are currently necessary to send a market signal to clean biomass and wind developers to bring more projects online. As our RPS ramps up, and RPSes across the region follow suit, it is critical to have enough projects in the queue to enable us to meet our targets.

Good Policy: Recycling before Incineration

This statutory change is a step forward but does not go far enough. Connecticut should take its new solid waste management plan seriously and work with the DEP and US EPA to set up robust recycling programs for many types of C&D waste, including the wood fraction. The EPA held a web training on this subject last week, and now is the time to invest in an infrastructure that will enable us to reuse many of these materials and avoid air pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions associated with incineration. With the creation of real C&D recycling markets, sorting companies could dispose of this waste instead of just combusting it. As we create a recycling infrastructure we should phase-out the loophole which currently allows sorted C&D wood to qualify as a Class I resource.